DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 364 824 CG 025 152

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TITLE Preparing Alumni for Student Recruitment.
PUB DATE Oct 93
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of College Admission Counselors (49th, Pittsburgh, PA, October 7-10, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Alumni; Higher Education; *Student Recruitment; Volunteers

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As recruitment budgets continue to tighten and with fewer colleges reporting application increases for their freshmen classes, enrollment managers must continue to explore all potential sources of recruitment talent. Alumni are often an underutilized or sometimes poorly utilized resource in recruitment efforts. Younger alumni, for example, may find it difficult to contribute financially to the institution. These same young alumni may find the privilege of representing the college as a welcome opportunity to immediately give something back to their alma mater. This paper outlines some key steps in establishing and maintaining an effective alumni recruitment program. It emphasizes the importance of training volunteers and proposes an organizational framework for development of such a program. Those interested in establishing an effective alumni admissions program are encouraged to first develop a written strategic plan for specifically utilizing alumni in student recruitment. Resources that can help in developing this plan are suggested. It is also suggested that objectives be set, program parameters and membership goals be established, personnel and budgetary considerations be addressed, and support from the college administration by secured. The next sections focus on how to recruit alumni volunteers, structure the program, train volunteers, remove volunteers when necessary, and evaluate the effectiveness of the program. The document concludes by briefly describing the formal alumni recruitment program begun at New York Chiropractic College in 1991. (NB)

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Preparing Alumni for Student Recruitment

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ABSTRACT

As recruitment budgets continue to tighten and with fewer colleges reporting application increases for their freshmen classes, enrollment managers must continue to explore all potential sources of recruitment talent. Alumni are often an underutilized or sometimes poorly utilized resource in recruitment efforts. Younger alumni, for example, may find it difficult to contribute financially to the institution -- savings, and consequently giving, increasing with age (Baade and Sundberg 1993). These same young alumni may find the privilege of representing the college as a welcome opportunity to immediately give something back to their alma mater. This paper outlines some key steps in establishing and maintaining an effective alumni recruitment program -- emphasizing the importance of training volunteers -- and proposes an organizational framework for development of such a program.

INTRODUCTION - WHY ALUMNI RECRUITMENT VOLUNTEERS

In the fall of 1992, seven in ten National Association of College Admission Counselors (NACAC) member schools reported a rise in applications. By 1993, this number had fallen to six in ten (NACAC 1993). And while enrollments at U.S. colleges and universities showed an overall increase as well as an increase in total full-time enrollments (FTE), 26% showed a decline in total FTE. The declines were most pronounced among the 4-year public universities with a 38% FTE decrease (ACE 1993). Clearly, enrollment managers continue to feel the pressure in "keeping the numbers up" (Wilson 1990).

Successful schools have managed to stay ahead of the curve by attracting more prospects, more applicants and ultimately either more matriculants or a higher quality matriculant pool (depending upon the institution's mission). An increase in admissions volunteers translates directly into more contacts with prospective students and a larger pool of qualified applicants. In a 1991 survey of 650 responding colleges and universities, Ingersoll Williams and Associates (1992), now part of the Noel/Levitz Centers, found that 65% of institutions planned on increasing the use of alumni in recruitment efforts. In the 1993 NACAC survey mentioned previously, fully 70% of institutions indicated they were using alumni volunteers in recruitment efforts. Of this number, 77% of private institutions incorporated the services of alumni while only 57% of public institutions did the same. When these percentages are viewed in light of the increases and decreases in FTEs outlined above, it becomes clear that at least one of the things that the most successful institutions are doing is utilizing alumni in student recruitment.

Increasing Institutional Fit

Available research has shown that a better "fit" between students and a college results in increased levels of satisfaction *and retention* (Hossler 1984). What better constituency to communicate to prospective students the "perceptual reality" of campus life than someone who has first-hand experience. Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts, is one example of an institution that has successfully utilized alumnae to communicate the college's mission and sense of purpose to prospective students and in the process helped to achieve a better student "fit" (Kuh 1991).

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Broadening Geographic Diversity

It may not be enough to simply increase the number of students on campus. College mission statements and boards of trustees resound with the call to increase geographic diversity within the student population. A college's graduate diaspora may provide the institution with the personal, "hometown" contacts for prospective students, and possibly more importantly, *their parents*. In the 1980's, DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana, showed success in broadening the geographic base of its student population by involving alumni in recruitment efforts (Murray 1986).

Broadening Demographic Diversity

Geographic diversity, however, often takes a back seat in today's higher education marketplace to increasing the component of underrepresented populations on campus -- minority, first-generation college and non-traditional students (Maffet 1989). Alumni provide a ready-made similar demographic base from which admissions offices can solicit help to meet a specific need. This may be of particular importance to note for smaller colleges and universities where limited budgets may also limit the hiring of counselors for very specific functions (e.g., AHANA recruitment). It is also important to note that such role models can have a *significant* impact upon the retention component of enrollment management as well (Sedlacek 1989).

Stretching Recruitment Budgets

In an area where a significant number of admissions budgets are either not increasing or even decreasing (Ingersoll Williams and Associates 1992; NACAC 1993), it is vitally important that admissions officers receive the greatest return on their recruiting dollar. Alumni recruitment volunteers can be an extremely cost-effective (though not free) mechanism for reaching inquired as well as applied students.

Peer Advisement

Parents exercise a tremendous influence on students' college choice decisions (Chapman 1984; Conklin and Dailey 1981), whereas college admission counselors and recruiters have actually been shown to have the least impact on college matriculation (Tillery 1973). As peers, alumni volunteers can be crucial in talking to parents of prospective students *on the same level*. They can allay fears and answer questions that a parent may find difficult to pose to a 22-year-old admissions counselor.

Closing the Sale

In today's higher education marketplace, the rising number of students who file multiple applications is accompanied by a corollary increase in the number of students accepted to more than one institution. Many colleges and universities have been successful in having alumni host admitted student receptions to "close the sale." Miami University of Ohio and Pennsylvania State University are but two examples of institutions that have successfully integrated alumni receptions into their student recruitment activities.

ESTABLISHING THE PROGRAM

Your first step in creating an effective alumni admissions program is to develop a written strategic plan for specifically utilizing alumni in student recruitment. A number of excellent sources can assist in developing strategic plans for enrollment campaigns (Cope 1981; Guiltinan and Paul 1988; Hossler 1986; Hossler, Bean and Associates 1990; Kemerer, Baldridge and Green 1982; Kotler and Fox 1985; Peat Marwick 1987). Within the strategic planning process, the first step is to ascertain those goals or objectives which you wish the program to meet.

Setting Your Objectives

In establishing your objectives, be clear in what you want the program to accomplish. Assess your institutional goals first. Is your primary goal to achieve a greater applicant pool, a greater geographic diversity among applicants or a higher number of matriculants? Next, consider whether alumni can help you meet these goals? What things can alumni not do? Write the positives *and* the impediments down. The goals of the alumni recruitment program should build upon the strengths and address the negatives.

As an example, if the primary mission of the alumni recruitment effort is to increase applications, then you might wish to recruit large numbers of alumni to represent your college at as many high school fairs and career days as possible. If, on the other hand, your primary goal is to increase the number of matriculants, you might choose to focus the energies of the alumni recruiters on hosting receptions for accepted students.

Establishing Program Parameters and Membership Goals

How many alumni do you want to involve in recruitment efforts? How do you want them to fit into the program? Remember, it never hurts to start small and build upon success.

You will also need to address the issue of how you want alumni to interface with the college in regards to the alumni recruitment effort. Do all alumni report directly to the admissions office or a hybrid admissions/alumni office? Do they report to a single individual or to other alumni coordinators? Again, start small, with a flat structure where your volunteers report directly to one admissions representative. As the program grows, utilize the talents of volunteers accordingly. Draw upon those alumni who may not be the best speakers but have good organizational skills to help you plan the activities of other volunteers. Eventually, you can develop a more hierarchical structure with alumni volunteers reporting to other area or regional alumni volunteer coordinators.

Personnel and Budgetary Considerations

Alumni recruitment volunteers are <u>not</u> free. There will be postage and telephone costs to consider as well as increased time demands upon admissions/alumni office personnel. One admissions staff member, working half-time, can easily become swamped with the demands of alumni volunteers during peak recruiting season. You'll use additional publications and you'll also need additional recruitment materials for high school fairs and career days. The payoff, however, is more prospects, more applicants, and more matriculants.

Winning the Support of Your Administration

On some campuses, alumni recruitment efforts may be seen as a competitive threat to the development office's own initiatives to win support for the institution. Identify the key players at your institution and elicit their support in the early planning stages. It is important to note that alumni who are active in student recruitment efforts report a tremendous sense of self-satisfaction and achievement which can be translated into future opportunities for the college. At Palmer College of Chiropractic in Davenport, Iowa, alumni who assisted in recruitment efforts were more likely to increase their gifts to the College in years immediately following recruitment activities.

RECRUITING ALUMNI VOLUNTEERS

Your alumni and development office can provide you with a list of alumni, but what next? The key to recruiting alumni is to spell out the qualities you desire in alumni volunteers and the benefits of membership.

Where and How to Look

When it comes to finding alumni who will serve as the core of your program, consider the old-fashioned personal approach. Consult your alumni office, college staff and faculty for names of prospective volunteers. Use these personal references to recruit the core of your organization. If these referents don't have the time to volunteer, they often know of someone who does.

Your next step is to solicit volunteers from the general alumni population. You can make use of official alumni association or college publications to announce the formation of the organization at little or no additional cost. You can also use direct mail and business reply cards to solicit an initial list of names. Follow up with *both* a personalized letter of welcome *and* a telephone call. You must remember that it is important to make the time for personal contact with this group of volunteers as a means of ensuring that they will stick with the program.

Incentives to Membership

There are both tangible and intangible rewards for the alumni who will assist you in recruitment efforts. Many alumni report a sense of renewed pride and accomplishment as a consequence of their activities in recruiting students for their alma mater (Mount 1991). And while these intangible benefits are important, you can and *should* make tangible benefits available at little cost to volunteers. Such benefits can include: (1) A "personalized" letter signed by the President thanking volunteers for their efforts; (2) Press releases to hometown newspapers detailing any recruitment activities undertaken by alumni (business professionals will recognize the benefit of such free publicity); (3) Listing of all volunteer recruitment activities (and who undertook them) within the alumni association's publications; (4) Discounts or other financial breaks on alumni activities offered by your college (e.g., paid registrations for homecoming activities, continuing and postgraduate education courses); (5) Vouchers for use at the college bookstore or for continuing and postgraduate education; (6) Special receptions for recruitment volunteers during homecoming or other designated weekends; (7) Name recognition of the most outstanding volunteers at homecoming football games, and so forth; and (8) Awards (e.g., plaques, desk clocks) for volunteers who meet or exceed specific goals.

Outlining Responsibilities

When recruiting volunteers, you must make your alumni aware of exactly what is required of them. A volunteer's level of involvement depends upon many factors, including the number of high school or college fair events in his or her area and his or her distance from your school.

Be specific about what you will require in terms of a time commitment. An alumnus with one high school in his area may need to volunteer only four to five hours of his time annually. More active alumni can donate anywhere from 10 to 20 hours in the Fall months and 6 to 12 hours in the Spring and Summer months. Provide your alumni with varying levels of commitment -- serving as a reference source for prospects; high school/career day representative for a defined geographic area; host for admitted and prospective student receptions, and the like. Let them choose their level of commitment and then *hold them to it.*

If your alumni are being compensated for their travel expenses, then clearly state your travel reimbursement guidelines. If not, as is most often the case, specify up front that all recruitment activities they undertake are entirely non-reimbursable. Don't assume that, because you use the word volunteer, people won't expect to be reimbursed for their mileage and meals. If you leave nothing to chance, then you won't create an unhappy volunteer.

Qualities to Look for in Alumni Recruiters

It is important to match the qualities of your volunteers to the needs of the organization. As mentioned previously, some alumni are better at organizing other volunteers and recruitment activities than actually talking with prospective students. Some may be best utilized speaking with parents. Either way, match the individual to the job. Even so, not every alumnus who will volunteer may meet your needs. It may be wise, therefore, to keep the "official" number of volunteers you are seeking low. This allows you to: (1) Promote the "exclusivity" of the organization, making membership more desirable; (2) It assures that the membership goals you set are met (and exceeded); and (3) It allows you to turn away volunteers if you determine they are not appropriate for the organization.

STRUCTURING THE PROGRAM

An active alumni recruitment effort can mean a tremendous amount of work on your behalf -- if you fail to organize it properly. Your alumni have volunteered to help you. Take advantage of this fact by having them manage the alumni recruitment efforts as well.

Hierarchical Organization

Designate one person in your office to serve as the coordinator for the program. That person should be prepared to devote at least half-time to alumni recruitment activities and preferably should be assigned to this activity full-time. This individual might best be based on campus and not be assigned traveling recruitment responsibilities that are not directly related to alumni recruitment and training activities. Having work-study students handle the preparation and mailing of materials allows this person to function more as a coordinator and manager.

The author's personal experiences have shown that one person may reasonably be expected to adequately manage between 100 and 150 volunteers on a one-to-one basis. Under ideal circumstances, you might consider limiting your alumni recruitment coordinator's contact to about 50 individuals. To ensure a proactive response, designate alumni admissions leaders or coordinators to serve as an administrative link between your admissions staff and alumni field volunteers.

The area leaders or coordinators can serve to: (1) Recruit and maintain a cadre of active alumni volunteers within their assigned area; (2) Telephone new volunteers and welcome them to the program; (3) Organize and implement alumni recruitment volunteer training activities on a regular basis; (4) Provide feedback on opportunities not currently being addressed by the admissions effort; and (5) Organize, plan and delegate approved projects and activities.

No matter how you structure the organization, there will be times when your intervention as an enrollment management professional is called for. To diminish the number of these situations, I suggest the creation of a board to oversee the management of the program. With five to seven numbers, the board can help in smoothing over difficulties with particular volunteers and can be most useful in interfacing with the alumni association. You might wish to seek representation on the board from the development office, the alumni association, and alumni recruitment area coordinators.

TRAINING YOUR VOLUNTEERS

A good recruiter is one who is informed and acts ethically on behalf of his or her alma mater. Failure to train alumni volunteers may result miscommunication to students which can result in lowered yields or eventual retention problems (Gallagher 1992). Both recent and older graduates need to be informed on what is currently happening at your institution and how they should properly communicate this to prospective students and their parents.

In training your volunteers, remember that some of us respond better to verbal forms of communication. Others prefer written. Your training of alumni recruitment volunteers should include both.

The Alumni Recruitment Manual

The first step in formalizing your alumni recruitment program is to prepare a manual to guide volunteers through the recruitment and admissions processes. The manual might contain: (1) Program goals and overview; 92) Organizational structure (who reports to who and why); (3) Responsibilities for each category of volunteer (including time and financial commitments if any); (4) Rules for effective and ethical recruiting; (5) Instructions on how to conduct oneself at high schools, career days, and so forth; (6) A calendar of activities; (7) Common questions *and answers*; (8) School highlights; (9) Area facts and highlights; (10) Directions to your school and listings of motels/hotels; and (11) A telephone directory of major offices.

The key is to balance brevity with completeness. Ideally the manual should be 20 to 40 pages in length and no more. Anything longer and your alumni are unlikely to read it. Finally, to be truly effective, the manual should contain both a table of contents and an index.

Training Sessions

As a complement to the written material you should require all volunteers to attend annual training sessions to review issues regarding student recruitment. These sessions can be coordinated with homecoming or other college weekends which would naturally attract alumni to your campus. Training sessions may also be held off campus in conjunction with regional alumni development activities.

Initial training sessions should focus on rules to follow when recruiting and how alumni representatives should act a high school fairs, career days, and the like. The entire admissions process -- from identifying prospects to registering new students -- should be explained in detail. Important facts and highlights of the college and the area should be emphasized. Frequent references should be made to the volunteer manual and where answers to the issues you raise can be found.

Subsequent training sessions may focus on other common questions asked of admissions representatives. You should also utilize this opportunity to focus on building public speaking and presentation skills. Unless you are considered an excellent public speaker, you might wish to enlist the assistance of some of your faculty or other administration coworkers to help in providing a seminar on public speaking skills. You might be surprised by how well such a presentation on public speaking will be received.

You can further help by providing a script for alumni recruitment volunteers to follow when speaking, for example, to a classroom audience. *Do not*, however, attempt to script the entire presentation. Make sure there is sufficient room for your volunteer to interject his or her own personal experiences into the talk. If prospects wanted to hear only an admissions promo they could listen to your video. The whole idea behind having an alumni volunteer speak is to personalize the process *so allow for personalization.*

Alumni Recruitment Materials

You must support your alumni recruitment volunteers with materials that legitimize them as admissions volunteer *professionals*. This includes but is not limited to printed name badges (including their admissions volunteer title) and business cards. Volunteers should also be provided with copies of all recruitment brochures, pamphlets and other recruitment materials (e.g., tablecloths, banners). It is the responsibility of the alumni recruitment coordinator to ensure that these materials are properly prepared and delivered well in advance of any recruitment efforts to allow the volunteers time for adequate familiarization with all of your materials.

Communication

The training handbook is but one form of communication. Other forms of desirable communication include a newsletter aimed solely at the alumni recruitment volunteer. Give careful consideration to what goes in the newsletter as well as what is to be left out. Send it as frequently as you can afford to produce it but most importantly, try and keep it on a regular schedule.

Telephone calls are relatively inexpensive and may produce the most satisfying results. Your alumni volunteers should be able to call in on a toll-free number if you have one. Your calls to alumni should be built in as part of the routine of the program. Of the tangible rewards mentioned earlier, a simple, heartfelt "thank you" may be the most effective form of communication.

Encourage Ingenuity

Should your college or university call for expansion of its marketing efforts beyond its traditional feeder schools, you will be less familiar with your market. As "hometown" representatives, alumni recruitment volunteers can be crucial in establishing contacts with high school counselors, teachers, club advisers, and the like. While your office should be responsible for initiating most contact with schools, allow and *encourage* your volunteers to make contacts with school representatives -- *provided the admissions office is kept informed of any activities prior to the occurrence.* Make sure that you stress this last point to your volunteers. There may be unintended consequences of their actions which you, as an experienced professional, might anticipate. At the very least, stress to your volunteers your need to be informed prior to any contacts so that you are prepared should a representative from the school contact you as a consequence of the volunteer's visit.

REMOVING VOLUNTEERS

If you are successful in promoting the benefits of your alumni recruitment program, you will be rewarded with a number of volunteers willing to assist the college. Good intentions sometimes conflict with reality, however, and the time commitment that seemed so easy to make six months ago may prove more difficult today. Therefore, you should constantly remind all volunteers of their commitments to the program. Stress that you plan visits and ask for invitations to events based upon their reported availability. If a volunteer cannot make the necessary commitment then he or she should remove himself from the organization.

Sooner or later a volunteer will fail to show for a scheduled appearance. If this situation does occur, immediately contact the volunteer for an explanation. The alumni volunteer should be asked to offer an explanation and apology to the appropriate individual or organization. You should follow up with both a telephone call and a written apology to the offended party. Politely but firmly advise your volunteer of the importance your institution attaches to careful maintenance of such relationships. Be sure to tell him or her that the organization, while composed of volunteers, operates under certain rules and regulations that have to be followed. If all else fails, directly inform the volunteer that his or her assistance is no longer needed. Many people find it hard to "fire" a volunteer because they are, after all, a volunteer and not being paid for their time. You owe it to your school and the remainder of the volunteers to act quickly and professionally in ending the relationship. Your alumni recruitment board can be extremely effective in helping you dismiss errant volunteers.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Your strategic plan for the alumni recruitment program should outline goals, strategies, and marketing action plans (MAPs) and specific criteria for measure the success of the program. Each of the MAPs should: (1) Describe the strategic target to be achieved; (2) Justify how the activity supports the larger

goals; (3) Provide timelines for when the activity will begin *and end*; (4) Describe how the activity will be evaluated; and (5) Provide a detailed accounting of time, budget and staffing resources needed to complete the activity. At New York Chiropractic College (NYCC), just such a strategic plan was first developed in May 1991.

New York Chiropractic College is a professional school conferring the Doctor of Chiropractic degree. Founded in 1919, the College relocated its entire campus from Long Island to Seneca Falls, New York, in September 1991. With the move the College, with an enrollment of approximately 600 students, went from a commuter school to a residential campus. Present enrollment is approximately 870 students. With present physical capacity and a record applicant pool, the college anticipates a maximum enrollment of between 944 and 989 students by 1995.

At New York Chiropractic College, the first efforts made at establishing a formal alumni recruitment program began in August 1991. Goals for 1992 were to achieve a membership of 50 members with membership rising to 100 *active* members by September 1993 and 200 active members by March 1995. Known as the Friends and Alumni Network (FAN), NYCC currently boasts over 160 active FAN Club members among its 3,900 alumni. In 1992, a written training manual was produced and distributed to all FAN Club members. An updated and abbreviated version of the manual is scheduled for production in 1994. The first formal training sessions were held in April 1992 and continue to be offered at various sites throughout the Northeast at regular intervals (corresponding to chiropractic state association licensing renewal activities).

Goals for 1992 included hosting 1 activity (college fair, career day, campus visit) per alumnus each year, a total of 50 activities. In the first year, over 58 activities were successfully executed. With membership currently exceeding projections, our 1993 goal is to continue have each alumnus undertake one activity annually -- resulting in approximately 175 activities. In 1995, we would like to see this number rise to 400 annually (2 activities per alumnus per year). The College has designated FAN Club members to serve as advisers to faculty and students at more than 18 feeder institutions

Over 65% of enrolling students indicate that they first heard of New York Chiropractic College through conversations with a Doctor of Chiropractic. This percentage continues to hold steady over the years and underlines the importance that our alumni play in recommending professional education to prospective students.

Clearly, the efforts of the Friends and Alumni Network at New York Chiropractic College has paid tremendous dividends in a short period of time. Colleges and universities that seek to grow and prosper during the 1990s and beyond would do well to establish their own alumni recruitment programs to aid admissions and recruitment efforts. And with proper training of alumni recruitment volunteers, colleges will be rewarded with not only more students but with greater diversity in the student population and a better fit between students and the institution.

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